



CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN'S WORK PARTICIPATION IN DOMESTIC AND MARKET SPHERES

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ABSTRACT

'Work is worship,' a very old proverb is the mantra towards the equal development of all humankind across region, religion, class, caste and gender. Unfortunately, there is enough evidence of unequal opportunity to male and female in all aspects from region to region. However, the average female labour force participation (FLFP) rate is increasing at the global level at around 50 per cent as per a report of International Monetary Fund. In case of India, women's work participation holds a key to the development of the country as almost half of the population is female. Surprisingly, despite gains in education, Indian women's work participation rate compared to men in the formal economy stands at a lowly 27 per cent (Lal 2017). Here, work participation sounds an area limited for economic analysis but as there are different spheres in which women participate and as it has intricate relationship with their social life; work participation of women can't be studied only from economic determinism. Therefore, this paper seeks to spell out the work participation of Manipuri women from two research studies. Firstly, it focuses on the participation of women in domestic sphere. Secondly, this paper analyses the extensive work participation of women vendors in a well-known historic 'Women Market' in Manipur, Northeast India.

KEY-WORDS: Women, Work Participation, Women Market, Domestic Sphere, Manipur, etc.

INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary social and economic circumstances, women are seeking livelihoods within extremely constricted options, determining for themselves where and how they will work (Forum against the Oppression of Women, 2015:324). Towards the equal development of all humankind across region, religion, class, caste and gender, 'work is worship' without any form of discrimination is the mantra for shaping an egalitarian society. Work participation of an individual is being officially recorded and academically studied for different purposes all over the world. Among multi-disciplinary studies, work participation sounds an area limited for economic analysis but as there are different spheres in which women participate and as it has intricate relationship with their social life; work participation of women can't be studied only from economic determinism. Moreover, there is enough evidence of unequal opportunity to male and female in all aspects along with regional variations. Therefore, women's work participation gradually became an area of profound concern and there is need for more empirical research from different perspectives.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper seeks to spell out the work participation of Manipuri women from two research studies. Firstly, it focuses on the participation of women in domestic sphere. Secondly, this paper analyses the extensive work participation of women vendors in a well-known historic 'Women Market' in Manipur, Northeast India.

For the purpose of both researches, the methodological design uses available secondary data on the selected theme apart from using primary data collected through interviews, personal observation, and field experiences. For the first objective, 115 Loi women were interviewed through an open-ended interview schedule. Likewise, for the second objective, 200 sample women vendors out of the total 571 sheds in Kakching Market were interviewed. All the collected raw data were tabulated through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for interpreting and generalising a conclusive finding as well as to give suggestions for further research. Both the researches were conducted in the Loi communities, Scheduled Caste population of Manipur. Before analyzing the data from field experiences, the brief account on the concepts 'participation' and 'work' are discussed below:

REVIEW ON THE CONCEPTS 'PARTICIPATION' AND 'WORK':

Broadly, 'participation' refers to take part in any human activity and 'work' has been defined as participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wage or profit. In other words, according to Census of India 2011, a worker is a person whose main work is participation in any economically productive activity. Such participation could be physical or mental in nature. Here lies the question of unpaid female household work. Further, Census' definition of 'work' involved not only actual work but also effective supervision and direction of work. It also includes unpaid work on farm or in any family enterprise. In fact, female worker should not only mean those who are engaged in economically productive activity like cultivation, agricultural labour or household industry but it must also mean any woman who works in any other prolific activity. It is more complicated to explain the boundary or limit of defining 'worker' due to frequent changes of definition over time from one census to another census though there have been some changes in favour of the worker.

Work participation rate or labour force participation rate of an individual referred to a section of working population in the age group of 16-64 years in the economy currently employed or seeking employment. The notion of exclusion or inclusion of unpaid female family labour in official records is numerous debated in the global platform. But, there are definitional biases all over the world especially at Third World countries. For instances, all women in agricultural households were included in the labour force in some countries like Turkey and Thailand whereas in North Africans and Latin American countries, wives of farmers were counted as housewives, not included in estimates of the labour force unless they participate in the productions of goods and services (Boserup 1973 cited in Agarwal 1985: A-157). In addition to the lacunae and shortcomings of available data in Censuses 1961, 1971 and 1981, Agarwal (1985) exposed their actual use in economic analysis reflects a male bias as the weights were predominately given to male labour time. Women's works were yet to be fully recognized as one of the most productive works as compared to men's works in both public and domestic domains.

Even though government of India has been trying to improve the situation of women in both paid and unpaid jobs by initiating new gender sensitive projects, policies or schemes, ground data shows something else. Annual Reports (2016-17 and 2017-18) of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India highlight the unequal participation of men and women in public work force and therefore there is possibility to have unequal burden of domestic works in almost all States in India. According to the International Monetary Fund Report titled 'Women Workers in India: Why So Few Among So Many?', India's female labour force participation (FLFP) rate is among the lowest within emerging markets and peer countries. India's FLFP or the share of employed women or those seeking work from the working-age female population is 33 per cent, almost half of the East Asian average of 63 per cent and well below the global average of around 50 per cent (Lal 2017). According to the information provided by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, the total number of female workers in India, as per Census 2011, is 149.8 million of which 121.8 million and 28.0 million female workers are from rural and urban areas respectively. Out of total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural labourers. Of the remaining female workers, 8.5 million are in household industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers. In another report published by Labour Bureau of India (2008) for the year 2007-08, the highest female work participation rate is noticed in Mizoram with 47.5 percent and the lowest in Lakshasweep with 7.3 percent. However, as per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51 percent as compared to 25.63 percent in 2001. In Manipur, the female work participation rate is 39.00 percent which is very much above the national average of 25.63 percent. Both in 2001 and 2011; in terms of female work participation rate, Manipur stood in fourth rank among all the states and union territories of India. In this situation, the present paper shows the work participation of Loi women of Manipur by combining two studies conducted at different intervals. The following sections are divided into two parts: Part – I consists the major findings from work participation of indigenous Loi women in domestic spheres and the Part – II consists the work participation of indigenous Loi women in formal market business for their livelihood.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DOMESTIC SPHERES:

Despite its higher rank in the female work participation rate, the ground level realities in Manipur show a bleak picture especially among some weaker sections of women in Manipur and it calls for serious policy considerations. For example, in some studies (Mukherjee and Singh 1989), exclusion of women from some village level socio-economic associations in Manipur was still prevalent. Here, mention may be made of women in the Marup system. Percentage of non-agricultural workers is higher than agricultural workers in Manipur. Another study on female labour force participation done by T. B. Singh (2012) entitled as 'Work Participation and Status of Women in Manipur' shows that as compared to men, participation of women in labour force is much low when it comes to principal status, weekly status and daily status. Many other researches on the problem of gender bias in Manipur highlighted that women in general are being excluded and increasingly marginalized in decision-making process and from their right to inherit property, and majority of them also concentrate their work in vulnerable sectors. There are educated and employed, educated and unemployed, and uneducated group i.e. illiterate Manipuri women in the State. The last category of women comprises the largest number and they came out openly to fight against the social issues in the state (Gangte 2011). However, in the tribal areas, the traditional systems never recognized the rights of women as primary decision-makers in matters of community issue like inter-ethnic conflicts crisis management, social sanctions, etc. So, womenfolk in this society have a long way of struggle to go to achieve their desired goal of upliftment and empowerment.

Participation of women in domestic sphere as found in the study shown that the first three activities, i.e. house cleaning, upkeep of children, and preparing and cooking meals are being performed by almost all respondents regardless of their caste, class and religion. Interestingly, the 'not performing' category of women includes such women whose work in this categories are performed by other female members of the household such as elder or younger sister/ sister-in-law, mother or mother-in-law, and aunty, etc. It seems that majority of husbands expect their wives to be expert in domestic sphere or women have fondness of cooking, cleaning, and child rearing.

Further, the data reveals that the percentage of women in last three categories is only 34.6 females who could look after their children's education. As far as tending the domestic animal is concerned, 49.0 per cent respondents are performing such activity while 51.0 per cent are not engaged with this activity. Almost 50.0 per cent get assistance in looking after their elders and tending their household animals. The findings from the research shows that the majority of women are still engaging in many domestic or household activities (especially unpaid job) even if they are the employee of government or private institutions and yet they share the responsibilities of domestic work among male and female members of their respective families. One of the findings from the research is that almost 90 per cent of the respondents are living in their own house and rest is residing in rented houses.

This study also analyses the household responsibilities taken by women according to their respective family type. Gender roles in every society is a social construction and it may vary from society to society but generally it is the female who are more engaged with the household responsibilities or domestic affairs and their responsibilities may also vary according to the type of family. This study is not exception as it clearly revealed the influence of family type on sharing of household responsibilities. It would be reasonable to think a greater sharing of responsibilities by women in nuclear families than in the joint families. Accordingly, it should be high in neo-joint families in comparison to traditional joint families. Observations made in this study depict the high level of responsibility sharing (especially with husband) was found to the maximum i.e. 45.3 per cent in nuclear families. While it was found to be 42.9 per cent in neo-joint families and none of household responsibilities were shared by husband or any male members in case of traditional joint families. However, cent percent of responsibilities were shared by relatives or helpers in their respective families. Therefore, it is confirmed that the possibilities or prevalence of equalitarian relationship were more in nuclear families.

WOMEN VENDORS IN FORMAL MARKET BUSINESS:

Economic activities in the formal sector include a range of income-earning work that is considered relatively permanent by the worker. Examples include wage employment as in a factory or in agriculture, practice of a profession, management of a business, and farming. In case of women markets in Manipur, it is almost formalized with the presence of concerned Municipalities for city and towns and Panchayati Raj for villages in rural areas. Therefore, women vendors in main market of every district in Manipur can be claimed as included in formal market sector except mobile street-vendors though their earning from market business are yet to be officially enumerated for the overall economy of the State.

It is interesting to note that 138 (69 per cent) out of 200 women vendors were financially independent when they started their respective small-scale business at market while the remaining 62 (31 per cent) were not self-financed sellers. They are using varied means to manage their business without borrowing money or taking financial assistance from others. A plausible reason for why majority of the respondents were self finance seller is the very fact that 97 per cent of the respondents were living on their respective own houses and only the remaining 3 per cent were living in rented house.

Vendors in the 'Women Market' can be broadly divided into two types, namely rented vendor and owned vendor across the class or caste based division. In the first category, women were selling their trading items in a rented shed and majority (52 per cent) of women vendors were found to be in the category of rented vendors. Whereas, 48 per cent of respondents were seating and selling on their own sheds. Though all the sheds were under the same concerned Municipality, women in varied sheds or types of vendors were paying different fees ranging from Rs. 5 per day to Rs. 300 and above per month. It was found that women came out to market for vending because of different reasons. Nearly one fourth of them came out to earn livelihood and an equal percent of respondents started vending items in the women market for earning coupled with time pass as the main reason. The most common reason among the women vendors behind starting business was found to be 'money problem' in their respective families. The smallest portion of the women vendors also came out to the market for business purpose to supplement their husbands whose earnings are not sufficient to run their respective families. Despite the maximum effort to run the household through market business, the study shows that 6 per cent of respondents were in debt and therefore it indicates profit from the selling items does not recovered such debt. Interestingly, 94 per cent of them were managing their business as well as household requirement without debt though they borrowed some amount. It was revealed that it is very rear to leave the market and hide the vendors for forever because of indebtedness/ bankrupt in their respective business.

CONCLUSION:

Studies on female work participation across the country have shown the wide difference between male and female participation rates as far as the economic activities is concerned. Especially in rural areas, the unequal wages of agricultural labour between male and female is still continuing across the state. Unpaid female family labours are enumerated officially in some part of the world while majority of the countries were neglected. Considering the participation of women in private and public spheres it was found from the studies that though there is no restriction in their occupational mobility from their traditional jobs to modern jobs, still Manipuri women are performing subordinate role in household responsibilities as well as handling market business in a patriarchal setup. But, many of them were yet to be fully enjoyed the financial matters or decision making in both family and public platform. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an inclusive development of women that entails providing or generating equal opportunities and increasing the rate of their participation in all spheres, economic as well as non-economic. Women's work participation should be at its best not only in paid job but also in non-paid domestic chores with an unbiased share of responsibility from men folks.

Acknowledgments:

First part of the paper extracts data from a survey conducted by the author for an unpublished working paper on "Work Participation of Loi Women" while working in CSSEIP, Manipur University. Second part of the paper reports some findings of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi sponsored research project on 'Gender Dynamics, Market and Empowerment' conducted during 2017-18. The author is grateful to the ICSSR, New Delhi for funding the project and thankful to CSSEIP, MU for the cooperation.

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